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MAX THOREK

ON

DAVIDE GIORDANO

SURGEON AND MAYOR



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One of the great pleasures of my recent visit to Europe was that of meeting the eminent member of our profession, who has been honored by his appreciative fellow-citizens with the highest executive station in the historic city of Venice. From his photograph, secured for the purpose of this brief account of his life and work, although it shows a very strong face, full of character, one obtains only a very imperfect impression of the real man, whose personality is an ideal compound of gracious suavity and dynamic forcefulness.

Accompanied by my family, I had the privilege of visiting Professor Davide Giordano, Mayor of Venice, in his chambers at the City Hall, in accordance with his invitation. Dominating in stature, imposing in appearance, and with a benevolent face which expels from every pore kindness, a benevolent smile and out stretched hands, he welcomed us to the famous city of which he has the honor to be chief executive. Our conversation, naturally beginning with references to the wonderful treasures of art, which bring to Venice lovers of the beautiful from all parts of the world, soon passed to a discussion of various phases of the practice of medicine and surgery in the different countries. Professor Giordano showed a marked interest in the scientific work of our profession in America, making many pertinent inquiries. During the conversation, I succeeded in adding to the photograph which he kindly autographed for me the snapshot which presents him as seated at his desk in the executive chambers where his laborious services to the city are efficiently performed. It was a special delight to converse with Professor Giordano, who has a tremendous store of knowledge, is brilliantly endowed, and has a personality that breeds confidence and mature manly judgment. Unfortunately, our stay in Venice was too brief to permit me to accept his further invitation to visit the hospital and watch him operate, and to be a guest at his home. To these privileges I am looking forward with eager anticipation at a later date.

After our fascinating interview, and while engaged in observation of the many wonderful artistic attractions of the marvelous city, my thoughts kept reverting to the civic services of the able men of our profession. Why are not other cities and nations as



ready as Venice to appreciate the potential value of medical men in important executive posts? No class of citizens is more finely trained or more highly prepared to serve the people in public activities. Professor Giordano, at least, is a shining light to point the way in this direction, and to demonstrate the wisdom of the city which has honored itself in selecting him for the position of leadership. His brilliant career is an encouragement and an incentive to superior service to every member of the profession which has the privilege of numbering him among its leaders.

Professor Giordano's professional career has been a long and interesting one. During his medical education in the University of Turin, he engaged in special training and work in the various branches of surgery in the local hospitals, having as his instructors and directors such eminent surgeons of the period as Novaro, Mo and Margary. In the year 1886-87 he was the chief student interne in the surgical department of the Greater Hospital of San Giovanni Battista and of the City of Turin, of which the distinguished surgeon Caponotto was the director. He received special laboratory training under Professor Perroncito in the Laboratory of Pathologic Anatomy. Here he became familiar with the use of the microscope, and had his interest in bacteriological studies thoroughly awakened. His earliest publications date to these student days, and show that his keen intellect was already becoming concentrated on certain important problems of the profession. In 1884, appeared the first of these, the subject being "a Note on Septicemia and on Some Antiseptics." It is an admirable summary of the knowledge of his time on the subject. In the same year, he published a second document entitled "A Contribution to the Aetiology of Tetanus." In "A catalogue of the Titles of Dr. Davide Giordano," which was printed in 1900, the following comment on this brochure is found:

"In this work is seen the first experimental demonstration of the identity of the 'Erdtetanus' with the 'Wundstarrkrampf'; in other words, of the peculiarity of the tetanic agent found in given regions and developing in certain classes of wounds. It is here shown how the bacillus of tetanus develops preferably in the anfractuous recesses of the wounds, while not easily to be found in the more superficial regions. . . . It is demonstrated, however, that the general infection is not necessarily due to the diffusion of the bacillus through the organism, but simply to the passage in a circuit of the poison prepared by the bacillus in the infected wound. (This theory, afterwards confirmed by other authors, is given precisely by Senn as a conclusion of the studies of Giordano, which he has recapitulated in his 'Bacteriologie Chirurgicale,' Paris, 1890, p. 168)."

Having acquired his doctorate in the year 1887, he was almost immediately called as medical-surgeon to the Valdesse Hospital of Torre Pellice, where he remained until 1891. A number of valuable publications testify to his activity in practical science during this period. It was a time of acquiring intimate experience in the details of professional practice, the fruits of which did not delay to become visible. 1891, we find him called to the University of Bologna, to become director of clinical surgery in the university laboratory, and to enter upon the work of giving instruction in operative medicine. Although still a young man, he quickly drew attention to himself by his exceptional skill and by the originality with which he approached his subject. Professor E. E. Franco, in the course of an appreciative sketch of his life and work, declares that he was and is an innovator. More than one hypothesis, propounded by him even in his earlier days, has been completely verified. In a number of cases, his experiments have determined the precise quantities of antiseptics desirable to produce the maximum effect.

In July, 1894, Professor Giordano was selected from among a number of competitors to fill the important post of chief surgeon of the Civil Hospital of Venice. In this distinguished post, he has remained, rendering distinguished services which have continually widened the circuit of his reputation and of his influence. The honor conferred upon him by his fellow-citizens, in making him the chief magistrate of the city, has added heavily to the labors of an already busy life; but it is the universal testimony that his official duties have been discharged with the utmost efficiency, yet have not impaired the quality of his professional services. For the honorable profession, which is his first and last love, he has an affection which no influence can weaken.

But one interruption has come to his labors in the Civil Hospital. During the World War, he spent a year on the Italian front, where his exceptional skill enabled him to be of invaluable assistance in lessening the sufferings of the wounded, and in restoring many valiant sons of Italy to the service of their mother-country. The subtraction of this year made the year 1920 the occasion of the completion of twenty-five years of actual service in the Hospital. The 21st of September of that year was set apart for a special celebration of the event. His pupils and



assistants, the entire clinical body of the Hospital and Italian men of science in general took pride in associating themselves to the expression of esteem for one to whom surgery owed so much. A gold medal was presented to him in commemoration of the event.

In the career of Professor Giordano, theory and practice have continually walked hand in hand. Although bold to the point of audacity in introducing innovations and combating cherished opinions, he was careful to proceed step by step only as warranted by the results of long and careful experimentation. He was never rash in the proposal of novelties which rested solely or chiefly on *a priori* considerations. Although intensely devoted to operative surgery, he was emphatic in condemning the excessive practice of ovariectomy, when less drastic measures might be reasonably expected to be effective. In this, he was for a time opposed to the general drift of sentiment and practice; but time has brought the profession to his moderate and balanced point of view. In other branches of surgery as well, he has always been an enemy of hasty resort to major operations, and has indicated and in some cases effectively demonstrated advantageous substitute methods.

As a contributor to professional literature, Professor Giordano has been prolific, a number of his treatises having taken an important place in the history of medical and surgical science. Professor Franco affirms that his "Compendium of Italian Operative Surgery" is a monument "*aere perennius*." His work on renal surgery ranks as a classic. The list of titles of his important productions numbers something above 130, each representing no small labor and a high degree of thought and scholarly research. At the age of sixty, he remains as productive as in his younger days. It is noted that in spite of his double duties in the Hospital and in his executive position, he has found time to make the year 1923 one of the most fruitful in his entire career in important publications. In addition to his articles and pamphlets on technical aspects of his art, he has engaged in close historical research, which has always possessed a special appeal for him. His recent little monograph on Vesalius illustrates the scope of his study and the exactness of his investigations.

The American colleagues of this distinguished savant unite in the hope that many years of usefulness remain to him.

Chicago, Ill.